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Source: *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Special Issue on Masculinities in Southern Africa (Dec., 1998), pp. 669-693

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2637469>

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## *The Allure of Violence: Men, Race and Masculinity on the South African Goldmines, 1900–1950*

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*In the history of the modern industrial world the Witwatersrand stands out in four key respects. First, the size of the workforce which grew from around 200,000 men in 1910 to over 400,000 in 1940; second, the longevity of an industry that has continued almost uninterrupted for well over a century; third its geographical concentration; and fourth, its exclusively male demographic character. All four of these features suggest that we need to pay very close attention to an important question: What kinds of masculinities, to use Connell's term, were forged on the South African gold mines? A succinct answer does spring to mind. The gold mines fashioned explicitly racial masculinities and an intensely monitored legal, economic and geographical boundary between them. Between 1900 and 1950 and probably for some time thereafter, the definitive encounter between white and black men in South Africa was underground on the gold mines. The evidence that we have on the relationship suggests that it was characterised by high levels of personal violence. This article explores worker relationships, and argues that the reason that violence was so common on the mines was that both black and white men celebrated the capacity for personal violence as a key element of masculinity.*

For most of this century the goldmines of the Witwatersrand have dominated the world's supply of gold. The mines are famously difficult and dangerous places to work. And they have been profitable for a long, long time. All of these features of the industry have attracted the attention of scholars. But perhaps the most unusual feature of the mines – certainly in comparison with industries of a similar size or type – is their exclusively male character. Between 1910 and 1990 the gold mines employed between a quarter and half a million men, and almost no women. (There were also very few women in residence on the mines.) Given their longevity and scale it is arguable that the ideals and the practice of manhood that have dominated South Africa in this century – what Connell calls hegemonic masculinity – emerged on the mines. This is a study of one of the defining features of the relationship between white and black men on the gold mines, and the heart of masculinity for both groups of men: the capacity for violence.

What follows is a sociology and history of interpersonal violence on the gold mines in this century. The road I follow is circuitous and it is only fair to let the reader know something about it before we start. After a brief and somewhat polemical review of the theoretical and historiographical study of male violence, the article moves to a discussion of the startling absence of women in the social life of the gold mines. I then turn (as others have before me) to the pivotal question of the socialisation of young men in twentieth century South Africa. Here my focus is on the centrality of controlled violence in the upbringing of both white and black men. In addition to a review of the rich anthropological

literature on this subject, I incorporate evidence from interviews with old white and black miners. After examining the institutions that young men were involved with prior to their arrival on the mines, the article moves to an examination of the evidence on underground violence proper.

I have attempted to disentangle the messy business of violence underground by following five related lines of investigation. The first problem was the character of violence at the outset of the industry, when the first generation of white and black South African men arrived on the mines in large numbers. The archival record is particularly rich in the early years of the new Union, and the testimony recorded allows a sociology of violence underground. After the First World War, the state and the Chamber of Mines, were much more reluctant to record the verbatim oral testimony of African mineworkers, so I have been forced to rely on a set of recently recorded oral interviews. These accounts provide rich commentaries on the second line of investigation – the character of violence between black workers underground in the 1930s and 1940s. They also speak angrily and eloquently about the memory of white violence. In this last area, a theme that emerges unmistakably is the dominating physical presence of white shift bosses and mine captains – men who ruled underground and who set the ideal of white masculinity for the mines and the society that grew up around them. At this point, the article turns to the ideas that senior white workers had of masculinity, their own and that of their black subordinates. Finally, we turn to the question of black workers' retaliation to white violence.

The argument that emerges from all of this is quite simple. Violence was ubiquitous underground. It was accepted and resented depending upon the circumstances. It was an essential part of the definition of racial identities, and the practical force of racist hierarchy underground. But it was also a celebrated, and defining, ideal of masculinity for both white and black men. It was the enthusiasm with which both white and black men remember and represent violence underground, and the centrality of the capacity for violence in their ideals of masculinity, that accounts for the pervasiveness of violence, both underground and in the strange society that grew up around the gold fields.

## Of Violence

Two groups of men, each shaped by powerful institutions of male solidarity and socialisation, met each other underground in very large numbers after the turn of the century. From the outset each assumed a racial identity – Settler or Native, white or black – that had been defined after centuries of social practice and was increasingly rigidly defined in law. White and black workers were mutually dependent, not simply economically, but for their very lives. Yet the evidence that emerges from the archives and from a wide variety of oral sources is unequivocal. The relationship between white and black men was pre-eminently violent.

The intensity of these descriptions of violence can be assessed if we jump ahead briefly to the oral testimony I collected for this project. David Sogoni, the youngest of four brothers who worked on the mines in the inter-war years, gave eloquent expression to what was a common theme:

There I noticed that the white man knows how to beat up a black person. We were beaten, we were beaten ... a fist would go up here, the fist would go up here. We were beaten with a *klap*. We were beaten. The *bhasboyi* wanted to beat us but it could not, because we were in a position to fight him. We were prepared that we would beat up a *bhasboyi*. We respected the white man,

because it was a person who appeared as unbeatable. That thing caused me to work *umgod*i [the mine].<sup>1</sup>

Sogoni's account suggests that three features of the encounter between white and black workers need to be carefully examined. The first is that for African men white masculinity underground was defined by violence. The second – reflected in the idea that white workers 'appeared as unbeatable' – was the psychological and political aura that surrounded white workers. And, thirdly, that violence formed an integral part of the motivation to work underground. Each of these will be considered in the pages that follow. But Sogoni's account also suggests the limits on the forms of violence present underground. Violence underground was starkly individualised. It was existential, as Masheane Matela remembered, 'You had to stand up for yourself – they would not help each other'.<sup>2</sup>

Franz Fanon's existentialist analysis of racism, colonialism and violence is the key text of modern social science understandings of violence.<sup>3</sup> (The only other account that has had a similarly deep intellectual footprint is Hannah Arendt's *On Violence*, and she spends much of her time attacking the New Left interpretation of Fanon's argument.<sup>4</sup>) And there is certainly much in Fanon's theory of the social psychology of colonial rule that is echoed in the oral testimony of black men who worked on the gold mines before the Second World War. In the first instance, Fanon stressed the ubiquity of violence in the colonial world. But his treatment of violence is ambivalent. Drawing upon the history of slavery and racial violence in general, he characterises colonialism as 'violence in its natural state', but moves on to a Hegelian treatment of the colonial encounter. Sartre's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* captures this Hegelian emphasis succinctly:

Make no mistake about it; by this mad fury, by this bitterness and spleen, by their ever-present desire to kill us, by the permanent tensing of powerful muscles which are afraid to relax, they have become men: men *because* of the settler, who wants to make beasts of burden of them – because of him, and against him.

For Fanon violence is the source of the liberation of the subjugated masculinity of the Native.<sup>5</sup> 'At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force,' he wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*. 'It frees the native from his inferiority complex and his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect'.<sup>6</sup> Setting aside the question of the empirical likelihood that violence has any of these effects, I simply want to draw attention to the ways in which Fanon celebrates violence. What is significant here is that for Fanon, like Marx and unlike Hegel, violence had a lurid fascination. It was simultaneously a source of dehumanising subjugation and the means of escaping subordination. For the men of the gold mines of the Witwatersrand violence also had these contradictory qualities.

In a wide ranging synthesis of the literature on male violence in southern Africa, William Beinart expands Fanon's emphasis on the violence of European colonialism to the

1 Interview of David Sogoni by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 3 February 1992. I collected a set of twenty interviews in the north-eastern Transkei between 1992 and 1996. The men interviewed were selected on the basis of having worked on the mines before the Second World War. Many of them were friends of Jones Mzayifani, who himself worked at Crown Mines in the early 1950s.

2 Cited in T. Dunbar Moodie, *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994), p. 58.

3 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963).

4 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970).

5 Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface', in Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 15. For the Hegelian analysis in Fanon, see pp. 36–41.

6 Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 73. Hegel's famous argument was the reverse of this. The bondsman – subjugated by a master who rules through violence – develops independent consciousness by acting in work upon the world. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York, Macmillan, 1955), pp. 229–240.

study of male associations in the countryside. 'Young men', he writes, 'have been wild cards in a number of African countries, as elsewhere, and it seems essential to discover how they became available for, or incorporated in, violent enterprises by looking historically at patterns of socialisation, associational life and the breakdown of controls.'<sup>7</sup> Drawing on studies as diverse as Alf Qabula's autobiography and the Mayers' unpublished two-volume study of youth organisation amongst the Xhosa, Beinart places great stress on patterns of conflict and drilling amongst young adolescent men in the countryside. Fleetinglly he takes up the argument of Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane's informant Johannes Rantoo:

We were stronger than those people, there was not another reason (for fighting). It was just the enjoyment of fighting and it was as if people were not satisfied during their time of herding. It was nice that thing of fighting each other like that, even though it was dangerous as it caused so many deaths.<sup>8</sup>

The point here is not that violence is endemic in southern Africa because people enjoy it. It is, rather, that the aesthetics of violence, its lurid power, and the emotional investment that men, in particular, make in it has to be acknowledged if we are to make any sense of its ubiquity and endurance.

Charles van Onselen has taken up one aspect of the emotional hold of violence in his study of conflict on the farms of the south-western Transvaal. He demonstrates that tenancy on the farms before the Second World War was couched in the idiom of the paternalistic family. 'Most breakdowns in tenancy agreements', van Onselen observes, 'could be traced to moments when the Afrikaner farmer came into conflict with his black tenant over the use and disciplining of the latter's adolescent boys'.<sup>9</sup> As young African men on the farms reached maturity they found themselves caught in a conflict between 'ideological' and 'biological' fathers. And the violence that white farmers displayed, even in its most elaborately sadistic forms, was rationalised and motivated by the idea of the paternalism. Racial violence on the platteland, van Onselen concludes, was focused on the extended family. In these encounters jealousy and betrayal were at least as powerful as anger and hatred.

But the most powerful of the imperatives to inter-personal violence is fear. The history of race relations in the USA in the century after the abolition of slavery suggests unequivocally that the most egregious acts of white violence – from carefully staged public torture to race riots – were motivated and justified by elaborately constructed panics. 'With the rise of Radicalism came the new fear', Williamson observed of the epidemic of lynching that followed the collapse of Reconstruction in the South, 'the fear of the Negro as rapist'.<sup>10</sup> In the staging of the hysteria that led up to explosions of violence, and the acts themselves, a powerful and lurid sexual imagination was intertwined with the fear of black men. In South Africa, the spectacular violence of lynching campaigns seems to have been confined to acts of conquest and military suppression, but racial fear was, and remains, a potent emotional force.

From 1900 to the middle of the 1930s, white working class men in South Africa occupied a precarious and deteriorating structural position. The early years of the century

7 William Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 3 (1992), p. 481.

8 Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea: A Participant's Perspective', in B. Bozzoli (ed), *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p. 447.

9 Charles van Onselen, 'Paternalism and Violence on the Maize Farms of the South-Western Transvaal, 1900–1950', in Alan Jeeves and Jonathan Crush (eds), *White Farms and Black Labor: The State and Agrarian Change in Southern Africa, 1910–1950*, (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1997), p. 198.

10 Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 121.

were marked by the probability of death from respiratory disease, and replaced by the early 1920s with the increasing likelihood of redundancy. White workers, by the 1930s, had entered into a kind of implicit agreement with management. They effectively abandoned their hold over production underground and took on the function of racial overseers. In return, management offered them vastly improved health, insurance and pension benefits and improved social facilities. If the early years of this century were marked by what we can call a crisis of survival for long-term underground workers, by the 1930s it had been replaced by a crisis of political recognition as white workers lost even the semblance of control over underground mining. Both of these predicaments tended to heighten the antagonism between white workers and the only members of the industry over whom they exercised real power.

In the first instance, then, the conflict underground was racist. Like whipping and lynching, the beatings were constitutive of two enduring categories of men – whites and blacks. They were racist, also, because they drew upon the old forms of social and cultural hierarchy, derived from slavery and conquest, to subordinate black workers to their white supervisors. Even where black men beat each other, the force of the conflict was usually the racial hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> Violence underground was also unlike more spectacular forms of racial, ethnic, communal or sectarian conflict. It was almost always personal, dyadic, to use the term Feldman has coined to distinguish forms of individual conflict in Northern Ireland.

Feldman's study draws attention to an important colloquial distinction between hardmen and gunmen. 'Gunman refers to the paramilitaries, irrespective of political affiliations', he writes.

The 'hardman' was the local bare-fisted street fighter intimately associated with specific neighbourhoods though often enjoying a city-wide reputation. ... For the keepers of local tradition, old-timers, and paramilitaries, the violence of the hardman and the violence of the gunman summarise different periods, forms, techniques, and intensities of violent practice ...<sup>12</sup>

Briefly, Feldman describes the forms of violence associated with each figure as dyadic and taxonomic. Where the hardman risked severe bodily injury in a direct confrontation with another individual to secure personal renown, 'the paramilitary is concerned with the anonymous collectivisation of violence – the subordination of the self by acts of violence to historical generalities'. The distinction here is useful, especially in regard to racial violence. Lynching in the US South at the turn of the century was clearly intended to be taxonomic and anonymous. 'A little lynching', as Williamson notes, 'went a long way.'<sup>13</sup>

The violence on the mines seems to have belonged to both categories. Assaults clearly served to subordinate black men as a group, but they occurred between men who knew each other quite well, and who continued of necessity to work together in a work environment that offered diverse opportunities, by act or omission, for revenge. In some instances, also, what was clearly intended as taxonomic violence, with white supervisors beating generic black subordinates, dissolved into dramatic dyadic encounters that could only be resolved by both parties agreeing to recognise each other as men. It is in this last respect that the racial violence that has formed such a common feature of twentieth century South African history deserves particular note. Black men fought back, sometimes collectively, but usually individually, and in doing so they took possession of the physical strength and fighting skill

11 Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 57.

12 Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 46–47. For the distinction between taxonomic and dyadic violence see p. 54.

13 Williamson, *Rage for Order*, p. 126.

that were highly valorised by both white and black men. Legal skill and economic sufficiency, as Dunbar Moodie has suggested, formed the normative heart of 'ubudoda' (the abstract noun derived from *indoda* or man) but both white and black men retained a strong surreptitious definition of manliness as physical strength.<sup>14</sup>

Conflict underground, then, was more than taxonomic racial violence. It formed part of a very complex field of cultural practice. Organised violence was a central feature of the upbringing of both white and black men, it was entertaining in particular contexts, and it was central to the definition of masculinity for both groups. But violence was also integral to the political-economic structure that encompassed both groups of men. Both white and black men faced an increasingly powerful, and more violent, state as the century progressed. And both groups of men worked in an environment that was saturated with a very different kind of violence: the violence of men, machines and explosives removing a narrow strip of gold-bearing ore from solid rock two miles below the surface and the violence of the earth itself, killing and maiming with casual splinters or mind-numbing movements of rock.

Workers on the gold mines, like the Tamil tea estate workers of Sri Lanka, adopted the symbolic vocabulary and practice of underground labour for their accounts and acts of violence.<sup>15</sup> In the early years of the century, when most workers were drilling by hand, the term used ubiquitously for beatings was 'hammering'. Even today, long after the demise of the hammer drillers, white and black informants use the word to describe the relentless application of physical or psychological pressure.<sup>16</sup> By the 1930s the word used to describe the work done by most new recruits on the mines – the loading of broken rock with shovels – was 'lashing'. This word is, as the Oxford English Dictionary notes, of difficult etymology in English, and even more so in South Africa, lying on the boundary between isiZulu, Afrikaans, Fanakalo and English. The root in English is surrounded by connotations of violence, and associations with slavery. In isiZulu, *layisha* may be derived from the Afrikaans *laai* (load) but the word also has colloquial associations with violence in the Nguni languages today: *Ngizomlayisha* translates as 'I will beat him'. The point is that work on the mines has been symbolically intertwined with violence from the outset. In their conflicts workers tended to use the weapons that were to hand – drillsticks, rocks, spanners – but the experience of underground work itself also shaped the technology of violence. Amongst the *izitshozi* gangsters of the 1920s and 1930s, for example, the favoured weapon was a finely sharpened *ijombolo*, the hardened steel drill stick used ubiquitously underground.

Amidst the noise and chaos of work and violence underground it is possible to discern a set of structural conditions that shaped conflict. These conditions were, in the first instance, spatial. Gold mines are essentially urban spaces, only more so. A mine is a very large building, with isolated individual rooms (pumprooms, workshops, stopes and shunting yards) connected by long winding tunnels. All space underground is confined, but some spaces were particularly contested. Much of the violence was focused on existential

14 Moodie has argued very persuasively that the defining characteristic of 'manliness' for senior Mpondo men was emphatically not physical strength, but the moral and intellectual strength to build a prosperous homestead. His evidence is incontrovertible for the abstract ideal of masculinity, but there can be little doubt from the widespread oral testimony collected on violence that most men – including very senior men – relished the less noble idea that physical strength and skill in fighting were the defining elements of masculinity. See Moodie, *Going for Gold*, pp. 37–40.

15 E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 81–100.

16 Interview with Cornelius Oosthuisen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992. These interviews were undertaken with the assistance of the current management of the East Rand Proprietary Mines, who helped make contact with retired and elderly former shift bosses. The three cited here – with Oosthuisen, Mathuisen and Lombard – are the only interviews completed to date.

encounters between whites and blacks in the tunnels, but the single most common site of conflict was in the marshalling areas where white and black workers waited for the 'cage' to collect them for the journey to the surface. Those workers – like drillers – who spent large amounts of time in the relative isolation of the stopes (or other 'rooms') were generally free from the constant harassment that was inflicted upon those – like trammers – working in the tunnels.

The second determining feature of violence on the mines was the implicit connection between white identity and state power. White workers functioned as representatives of an informal racial power within mine management, but as the racialisation of the state gained intensity after 1924 they increasingly came to stand as synecdochic representatives of the state's violence. Black workers were acutely aware of the implicit alliances between their immediate white supervisors and the heights of mine management, and they knew, also, that the magistrates and the police would side with white assailants. In practice this meant that legal prosecutions were very rare, although not unknown, and that white workers enjoyed a degree of immunity that encouraged supervisory violence underground. The relationship between the state and white workers was not, however, a consistently amicable one.

Throughout the period between 1910 and 1950 an average of six assault cases were prosecuted against white workers every month and, occasionally, the state paid particular attention to violence underground. The first, and most detailed, of these investigations coincided with the tumultuous events of the 1913 white miners' strike. There was renewed official interest following the 1922 white miners' strike, in the early 1930s as increasing numbers of white workers were claiming insurance compensation for assault from black workers underground, and again in the heightened political atmosphere of the 1940s.<sup>17</sup> But these official efforts were spasmodic and ineffective. African workers' retaliation increased in the 1930s, but it is the continuities of underground violence that are most striking. As early as the first decade of this century, the patterns of violence were in place on the Witwatersrand.

## **A World without Women**

The foundational legislation drawn up immediately following Union enforced a strictly male domain underground. The 1911 Mines and Works Act gave formal expression to the common sense idea that the gold mines were no place for women. 'No person', the act reads, 'shall employ underground on any mine a boy apparently under the age of sixteen years or any female.' Young males under the age of sixteen were employed on the mines throughout this century and the first part of this eighth clause was observed mainly in the breach. But the mining industry enforced its second part with a curious enthusiasm. Women were absent underground and scarcely to be found on the surface of the mines.

Even in those areas which mine management or the white public understood as suitable for the employment of women, the industry tended to use men. Officials like A. J. Orenstein encouraged the employment of male medical orderlies where women might easily have been employed. By the end of the 1920s there were dozens of hospitals and clinics on the mines, but only three of them – the Modder B, City Deep and Crown Mines Central Hospitals – employed women as nurses. At Crown Mines, seven white and 21 African female nurses ran a 400-bed hospital, which served as a referral centre for all the Central Mining mines in the area. Almost all the other mines followed the model of the massive ERPM complex in Boksburg where a similarly sized hospital (serving 11,000 men) was run

17 Keith Breckenridge, 'An Age of Consent: Law, Discipline and Violence on the South African Gold Mines,' PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1995, pp. 191–209.



entirely by men: seven white male 'orderlies' and 28 African 'attendants'. The overwhelmingly male (and adult) character of the gold mines was well captured by a survey completed by Rand Mines in 1927 that indicated a total of 2,750 African women and children lived on their mines, out of a labour force well in excess of 100,000.<sup>18</sup>

True, there were women around the mines, especially in the locations and slums of the central and Near East 'Rand, but there was also a wide gulf separating the men of the mines from these 'town-women'. In the first instance the state moved energetically after 1927 to remove women 'of known loose character' from the townships adjacent to the gold mines. (The evictions began with female immigrants from Mozambique and culminated in the wholesale removal of inner-city townships after the publication of the amended Native Urban Areas Act in 1930.)<sup>19</sup>

In the outlying areas of the East and West 'Rand migrants lived under a double sanction to avoid the women of the Witwatersrand. One of the oldest men interviewed for this study, Mfeketho Sogoni, took his first contract at Brakpan Mines in 1930. He fondly remembered his time there under compound manager 'Mashiqela (One who pushes)' Harrison, who allowed workers to take rations without having their work tickets stamped. 'People were filled at Brakpan – you just fill up'. After painting an idyllic picture of life in the New Shaft compound where 'quarters of cows' were handed out in the Saturday meat ration, the oldest of the Sogoni brothers described another key feature of the compound.

A person who goes to women in the location is not wanted. Mashiqela says when he hires you, 'All that are mine should not go about the streets, let them stay here. The old ones must eat the young ones and the old ones if stupid must be eaten by the old ones'. That thing means that young men used to meet with men.<sup>20</sup>

The politics (and culture) of sex in the compounds has been well examined. 'If the dominant mores of white society decreed that all black men, even senior mine supervisors were "boys"', Dunbar Moodie has observed, 'black workers themselves graduated from being "boys" for their fellow workers to being "men" with their own "boys" as they gained mine experience.' The influence of these 'gendered' same-sex relationships makes mischief of any simple account of masculinity but for the purposes of this essay we need note only that it tended to reinforce the peculiarly male character of life on the mines.<sup>21</sup>

Combined with the emotional and official powers of homosexual relationships inside the compounds was a pervasive fear of the women in town.

We feared women's disease – of the location. We feared to come back home to our girls with eGoli women's disease. That we were even told by the old people that 'Hey, there's a disease there' as Mashiqela also said that we should not go there ... We used to stay here enkomponi,

18 Chamber of Mines Archive [hereafter CMA] Native Labour – Miscellaneous, 1927, William Gemmill to Gold Producers' Committee [hereafter GPC], 'Medical service on scheduled mines'. Friday, 7 January 1927. Barlow Rand Archives [hereafter BRA] Rand Mines Sanitation Dept. – Disease and Accident Reports, 1919–1953, 53e1, 444, A.J. Orenstein to J. Martin. 'Medical Attention to Families of Native and Coloured Employees', Monday, 4 April 1927. See Burns in this volume.

19 CMA Native Labour Misc, 1927, Director of Native Labour to General Manager, TCM. 'Portuguese Native Women', Friday, 16 September 1927.

20 Interview of Mfeketho Sogoni by J. D. Mzayifani and K. D. Breckenridge, Siyaya, Eastern Cape, 3 February 1992.

21 Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 128. In his seminal study of sexuality on the goldmines Moodie has argued that homosexual unions were attractive to younger men as a financial supplement to their own efforts to set up independent homesteads, and to older men because they offered domestic labour commensurate with the status of household heads. Moodie, *Going for Gold*, pp. 119–140. In an analysis that stresses the affective nature of homosexual relationships in the compounds, Patrick Harries has argued that they served as 'rites of passage' in the emergence of young men and as symbolic re-orderings of the priorities suggested by the mines. Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa. c. 1860–1910* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), pp. 200–208.

eat the compound food, there's nothing we rushed for, we were even scared of the woman herself.<sup>22</sup>

In the years after the 1933 Depression, the numbers of women on the Witwatersrand increased, but for the 300,000 men working on the mines in this period, life on the mines was a world without women.<sup>23</sup>

## Paths to Manhood

The paths that young African men followed on their way to the mines have been well mapped out since Philip and Iona Mayer published their seminal work on 'socialisation by peers' in 1970.<sup>24</sup> In the rural areas that the mining industry drew on for its labour force, and particularly in the Transkei, young men were absorbed into a variety of age-cohort organisations. South of Mount Frere, male youth organisation amongst the amaQaba, or traditionalist isiXhosa speakers, was based on a hierarchy of fighting associations. All of these groups placed powerful emphasis on the teaching and valorisation of personal courage and fighting skill. Mastery of the codes, techniques and emotions of personal violence was clearly an important element of male socialisation in the countryside.

Aside from the graphic quality of the descriptions of individual conflicts and large-scale battles, youth organisations in the Transkei were also strikingly successful in inculcating the idea that violent conflict between adult men was an egregious and humiliating blunder. The same organisations that were preoccupied with the lessons of violence for adolescents taught the centrality of law in the behaviour of adult men. 'When Red Xhosa talk about education or maturing', the Mayers wrote, 'there is no theme they harp upon more constantly than that "boys settle things by the stick" but "men should settle things by law" (or "by words"), implying judicial or quasi-judicial disputing.'<sup>25</sup>

Towards the end of their article the Mayers implied that the restraints attributed to traditional male associations amongst the Xhosa were absent from their northern neighbours, the amaBhaca, amaMpondo, and the amaXesibe.<sup>26</sup> (IsiXhosa speakers in general made up the great bulk of the South African workforce on the mines between 1910 and 1940.) O'Connell has argued that the *iindlavini*, the youth organisation that dominated this region after the early 1930s, made a sharp break with traditional ideas of contained violence and generational respect (*ukuhlonipha*). His detailed account of the *iindlavini* in the vicinity of Mount Ayliff highlights their recklessness and violence.<sup>27</sup> These distinctions clearly reflect the ways in which local people understood the differences between the traditionalist *amakongo* and the more urban-oriented *iindlavini*.

The men I interviewed for this study come from much the same area twenty years on, and for them the *iindlavini* are fading examples of a more responsible and respectful form of male youth organisation. Far from being the harbingers of urban delinquency, my informants remember the *iindlavini* for their discipline and restraint. They do, however, stress the significance of the membership of these organisations in shaping the experience

22 Interview of Mfeketho Sogoni by J. D. Mzayifani and K. D. Breckenridge, Siyaya, Eastern Cape, 3 February 1992.

23 See Philip Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand, 1939–1955', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 3 (1988), pp. 393–420 for a discussion of the political consequences of female migration to the Witwatersrand during the Second World War.

24 Philip and Iona Mayer, 'Socialisation by Peers: the Youth Organisation of the Red Xhosa', in Philip Mayer (ed), *Socialization: The Approach from Social Anthropology* (London, Tavistock, 1970), pp. 159–189.

25 Philip and Iona Mayer, 'Socialisation by Peers', p. 173.

26 For a clear example of this contrast see Moodie, *Going for Gold*, pp. 193–194.

27 M. C. O'Connell, 'Xesibe Reds, Rascals and Gentlemen at Home and at Work', in Philip Mayer (ed), *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 255–303.

of migrancy. And this is the central point. For almost all isiXhosa speaking men in this century the journey to the mines (and after 1950 the search for work beyond) was shaped by membership in one of these male fighting associations.

These groups encouraged at least three forms of behaviour on the mines. They tended to bind young men from particular districts together. My informants all migrated with, or followed, brothers, uncles or other male relatives from their home districts. They played (or more commonly danced) and fought together. And, finally, they enforced powerful and enduring notions of appropriate male behaviour. The different forms of male association (from the rigidly organised *iindlavini* of the northern Transkei to loose groupings of young men at cattle posts in Lesotho or Botswana to variously well organised institutions of adolescent male circumcision) all seem to have imposed these features on male migrancy to the mines. African men who arrived at the WNLA compound in Johannesburg knew how to fight, individually and collectively, they knew also about the ideal limits on violence, and they understood the central importance of supporting home friends.

We know a great deal less about the white men they found on the mines.<sup>28</sup> What little has been written about the first generation of white miners is concentrated in two areas: trade union organisation and disease morbidity. There are good grounds to believe that the two are closely connected, and that the white workers on the Witwatersrand before 1922 were militant in large part because they were preoccupied with the physiological (and emotional) costs of working underground. In a similar way, the relationship between the pervasive fear of death from disease (especially silicosis) and the vitriolic forms of racism underground before the First World War demands further analysis. But evidence of the kind that would allow us to make sense of the ideas of the first generation of white workers is not yet available.

We do know that between 1900 and 1922 organised white workers fought repeatedly to secure their hold over skilled jobs underground.<sup>29</sup> During the war, 'the swing of the pendulum', as the Chamber President, Evelyn Wallers, put it, was 'at present in favour of the men'.<sup>30</sup> Immediately following the armistice, three new exigencies combined in the violence of the 1922 Rebellion. The first of these was the unprecedented inflationary crisis of 1919–21, the second the determination of mine managers to seize line control of the new rock breaking technologies, and the third was the arrival on the mines of very large numbers of Afrikaans men from the countryside. These men, like their African counterparts, brought with them nineteenth century forms of military organisation.

Trade unions were the characteristic male associations of the English-speaking men who had found their way to the mines of the Witwatersrand at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> But by the beginning of the 1920s this first generation had disappeared from the mines and three-quarters of the white men on the mines were Afrikaans speaking. In the early weeks of 1922 this new group of platteland miners infused the Boer commando into the explosive mix of white worker protest. The resulting confrontation between the white paramilitaries and the combined arsenal of the state was spectacular enough. But the

28 Despite the wide treatment of white workers in the earliest Marxist analyses, the social history of white workers is extremely thin. See for a comparative study of the ethics of white masculinity on the farms of nineteenth century Natal, Robert Morrell, 'The Schools of the Natal Midlands', in Jeeves and Crush, *White Farms and Black Labor*, pp. 172–191.

29 Frederick Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); David Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Organized Labour on the South African Gold Fields, 1902–1939* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1983).

30 Cited in Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold*, p. 111.

31 Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Making of the Working Class 1870–1914', *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 197–98.

significance of these events lies less with the intensity of the conflict than the marked decline of organised white working class violence that followed. After 1922 white workers had lost the battle to retain independent control of the underground labour process; their function underground thereafter was essentially supervisory. The ferocious response of the state – which included the use of artillery and aerial bombardment – taught the object lesson that the commando was a useless anachronism.

By the early 1930s a new generation of Afrikaans miners – driven off the land by drought and the Great Depression and attracted by the incentives offered by the Government Miners' Training School (GMTS) – were entering the mines.<sup>32</sup> There are striking parallels in the lives of Afrikaans miners entering the Witwatersrand from the platteland after the Depression and African miners who came from the Transkei. The paths that each group took to manhood seem identical, but reversed, especially in relation to the key questions of marriage and the establishment of households. Take, as an example, the life of Cornelius Oosthuisen, who started working underground at the Government Miners' Training School in Brakpan in 1937 and ended his career in 1976 at East Rand Proprietary Mines as a Mine Captain.

Oosthuisen, like the isiXhosa-speaking men I interviewed, began his life at a great distance from the mines, 'farming down Upington way'. And, like the Xhosa migrants, the young men who left the platteland farms for the mines did so in order to resolve the problems of generational succession.

Ja, and you take now the parents there in the platteland, in the country, the children are going to school in town, boarding school. And, err, some of them is going to varsity. They don't come back to the farm. They can't. They've never ... Alright, maybe there's three or four boys. Two of ... They can't make a living there. Two sons and the father. They must, they must come to the city rather.<sup>33</sup>

By the 1930s Afrikaans families in the countryside had reached the economic limits of male divisible inheritance.<sup>34</sup> Simply in order to survive, young men from the farms were forced to look for jobs in town, and mining 'was the only place where there was money'.

Like black migrants, the young recruits who found their way to the GMTS were housed in single sex hostels and paid appallingly. During their initial months on the mines these white apprentices earned considerably less than the average wage of black workers.

I, I start now in the school of mines. We were staying in the hostel, then they ... Ja, the GMTS. Ja, per day. Two and six went for your food. The government pays the rest. But you get ... for six months my pay was £2.12 per month.

But unlike black workers, white apprentices faced the prospect of rapidly increasing wages. As they completed the requirements for a miner's 'ticket', and began to take up contract work on the nearby mines, they moved quickly out of the abject poverty of initiates.

And then after six months I got my blasting certificate, and then I got one and six bonus. And, err, but now the mine was very clever too, there. They didn't have relieving miners, whenever a miner goes on leave, they borrowed a jumpstudy as they called us to go and relieve that miner. Then they give you ten bob, ten bob a day. Now hell it's a hell of a jump from four and six to ten bob. Now, if you get results then they ... they always ask for you. So after I got my ticket most of my time I spent working for the companies. Ja.

The GMTS acted as an interface between the world of the platteland farms and the

32 By the middle of the 1930s there were 1,500 white trainee miners enrolled at the GMTS annually.

33 Interview of Cornelius Oosthuisen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

34 William Beinart and Peter Delius, 'Introduction', in William Beinart, Peter Delius and Stanley Trapido (eds), *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 3–5.

industrial domain of the mines. As soon as they were able the young recruits found ways to escape the regimentation of hostel life. 'Well you know there out at Modder B the people, the miners used to come on bloody horseback there', Oosthuisen remembered, 'They were all staying out there on the plots'.

As for many of the isiXhosa-speaking informants, the move from life on the farms to work underground was a shock. Oosthuisen chose different words to express exactly the same theme that black informants highlighted: 'underground it's not like working on the farms'.

There were many a days I, I'm underground. I sit there and then I must shake myself to realise. I ask myself what the hell have I done to come to this bloody place.

But the social differences of life on the mines for white men – and by the 1930s there were many – completely altered the meaning of underground work. At the heart of this social world was the sport of rugby. For Afrikaans men the commando was a figment of the forgotten past and the idea of the regiment was associated with their somewhat ridiculous experiences of the Engineering Brigades formed during both world wars. Aside from a new kind of regimentalism that was closely associated with the Kafkaesque powers of the modern South African state, new forms of male association were strongly developed for this generation of white men. And chief amongst these was rugby.

Even in his old age Cornelius Oosthuisen is a very large man. This commanding physical presence is closely intertwined with his fame as a provincial rugby player and his youthful powers as a pugilist.

But you know I was full of sport. Ahh, it was rugby season. My school-mate friends, you know, playing rugby and then you have to take, while you're there you have to take part in sport, ahh, alright rugby in the winter and in the summer you must bloody-well do any bloody thing. Well, I used to box a bit. So I made friends from boxing and, ahh, you know if they see you can use yourself they, they soon make friends with you. [chuckle]

On the mines, rugby was perhaps the most important non-mining activity. In many respects, in fact, it determined much about the underground work hierarchy and patterns of employment. But Oosthuisen's interest in boxing highlights another, related, aspect of authority on the mines. The ability to 'use yourself' was clearly one of the primary requirements of senior underground officials.

The powers of organised sport extended far beyond the mines. They shaped the paths that young white men chose to follow, and did much to hold them on the mines. For Oosthuisen the irrevocable decision to leave the land was determined by the tight social connections between sport and young women.

No, but most of [the Afrikaans miners], man, most of them doesn't want to go back. The old man is so old. He can't look after the farm anymore. He's sitting in town – I know what I'm talking about! – and the boys had to do, well it's just sheep farming you know, they've got to look after the farm and after the sheep. The old man will go out once a week, maybe twice a week and so on. But they are doing the farming. The sons doesn't want to be there. It's too lonely for them. If you've been to varsity and those places, and you take part in all the sports and all the nice young women. Hêre, you'd be bloody mad if you go and sit there on the farm. That's for sure.

Oosthuisen's sad enunciation of 'It's too lonely' spoke volumes about the ways in which social life for whites in the platteland had broken down. Above all it suggests that the prospects of attracting a wife back to the farm were slim indeed. A more direct contrast with the experience of black migrant workers is hard to imagine. For white men, wives were to be found in town, but for black men they were only in the countryside.

After 1935, the GMTS was a very important source of young white men for the mines,

but it was not the only way to enter the industry. Indeed, with its carefully scripted sporting arrangements and social calendar modelled on university life, the GMTS contrasted sharply with the traditional apprenticeships of gold mining. Another retired ERPM Shift Boss, Joe Mathuysen, explained a very different kind of career path.

Can I just tell you something else? How I, you know, got to be a miner. I started here as a skipman, for about three years, then I went for a pumpman for about a year. Now this is big pumps, it's not small ones, it's real big ones. Then I went for a loco driver, or a tractor driver as we called it at that time. Now I was a shift worker for about twelve years, before I eventually went on to ... as a learner miner. [...] Then you mined for a year, and then you just signed and you were permanent. And I mined for a year, and I was then made a shift boss after a shift boss was killed here. They made me a shift boss after a year of mining. And that's how I became a miner. It took me quite a few years to get to a shift boss.<sup>35</sup>

Mathuysen's succinct curriculum vitae nicely captures the hierarchical character of underground work for white men. The clear lines that were drawn between shift workers, who had no access to the bonuses earned by miners on contract, were almost as powerful as the lines between miners and officials. His short account also highlights another important feature of mine work. Advancement in the underground hierarchy, like promotion in wartime, was driven by the requirement to fill dead men's shoes.

Mathuysen's more orthodox apprenticeship was followed by those whose fathers had worked on the mines before them. 'My father', he commented, 'was a miner on this mine'. And this observation was followed by an unprompted exclamation about the importance of kinship at ERPM.

This was a family mine. This was a – really – this was a family mine. I can only think of ... unfortunately he's not here. The one manager that was here, Mr Reineke, I think that it was him and four and five of his brothers. The Mullers ... [...] Now you take Mr Oosthuisen here. He was this man's uncle. Aah, there were so many brothers. That bloke there is van Vuuren. There was three of them on this mine. This was really ...

The idea that black workers migrated in extended groups of 'brothers' formed the foundation of recruitment from the middle of the nineteenth century. Mathuysen's testimony suggests mines like ERPM were 'family mines' for white and black workers. But these were unusual families, families of men, bands of brothers.

## **The 1913 Crown Mines Inquiry**

I turn now to the history of interpersonal conflict between these men of the mines. The 1913 commission of inquiry into the grievances of black workers at Crown Mines was prompted by reports amongst recruiters and Native Affairs officials of extraordinary levels of violence underground at the Crown Deep and Langlaagte shafts. In the archival record the verbatim testimony of the witnesses to this commission is amongst the most compelling evidence of the character of underground violence. And there were good reasons that the state went to the unusual lengths of producing a verbatim English transcript of the witnesses' testimony. For the officials involved, the commission was an attempt to force the Crown Mines management to discipline the 'lower class of miner', and they singled out the 'Dagos ... and "sons of the soil"' hired in the wake of the 1907 white miners' strike. The evidence of black workers allows us unprecedented insights into violence underground. But we should not forget that the testimony itself formed part of a complex struggle between the state, white workers, and black migrants; nor that the inquiry came to an end just three days before the

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35 Interview with Joe Mathuysen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

start of a strike that would see the white miners threaten the very foundations of the fledgling state.

The Crown Mines commission of inquiry leaves little room for doubt that for black workers before the First World War, the work relations of underground mining were intrinsically violent. The experienced workers appearing before the commission commented laconically on the ubiquity of violence on the Witwatersrand mines. Njali, an Mfengu worker from Tabankulu, had worked at 'Benoni, Angelo, Robinson and Roodepoort'. 'On the other mines, even at Benoni', he pointed out, 'there used to be a lot of assaulting. I can hardly say one mine is better than another.' But, while all agreed that violence was ubiquitous underground, they differed quite sharply in the form of their indictments. And these different criticisms are revealing of what we might call the sociology of underground violence.

Perhaps the strongest appeal in the testimony was against what Goodrich described in the US coal mining industry as 'supervision by knocking'.<sup>36</sup> Skilled workers were outraged that white supervisors tended to rely on violence as a substitute for any form of work instruction. 'Even with new boys who don't understand the work', explained a veteran Mozambican 'Boss Boy', 'the boss comes along and assaults them, and some of them have to go to hospital.' As a result the first days underground were filled with peril, and a worker's body might experience more violence than his drill-bit. 'The first day I arrived here under contract I was hammered', a hammer driller called Bloemsizla told the commission, 'and I went to the shift boss and he went for me ... then I went to the Mine Captain and he hammered me too.' And the witnesses attacked the use of violence in the ordinary supervision of work underground. 'The work of the mines would not stop if the boys were not chased and hammered', Njali argued, 'On the contrary if they would leave off this assaulting it would go on much better as the people are all frightened to go underground.'<sup>37</sup>

Many of the witnesses described examples of white workers assaulting black assistants after accidents or mishaps underground, but they also indicated that specific classes of work were prone to continuous assault, whilst others tended to be free from the interference of white workers. 'I asked not to be put on lashing and I went on hammers', one witness told the committee. 'That is the only work where you do not get assaulted because in lashing you are constantly being hustled.' Lashing and tramming – manhandling the skips along the tunnels – remained poorly paid and subject to constant violence throughout the inter-war years. And these jobs stood in marked contrast in terms of pay and status with the solitary work of the hammer and machine drillers working in the stopes.

Another powerful theme running through the account of violence at Crown Mines was at the intersection of paternalism and masculinity. Violence underground served to teach, but it simultaneously manufactured a racialised masculine hierarchy. 'The whitemen beat us at work sometimes', as one of the workers put it, 'just like a father if one does anything wrong.'<sup>38</sup> And for many workers it was precisely the emasculating character of underground violence that was most objectionable. 'We are not children, we are men', Sibanga, another Mfengu from Tabankulu complained, 'and yet they catch us by the neck and throw us into

36 C. Goodrich, *The Miner's Freedom: a Study of the Working Life in a Changing Industry* (Boston, Marshall Jones, 1925), p. 50.

37 Transvaal Archives Depot [TAD], Government Labour Bureau [GNLB] 111, 1376/13 Treatment of Natives, Crown Mines, 1913–1914, 29th Witness, Fourth Sitting 25 June 1913, Third Witness, Third Sitting 24 June 1913, Eighth Witness, Fourth Sitting, 25 June 1913, Eighteenth Witness, Fourth Sitting, 25 June 1913.

38 TAD GNLB 111, 1376/13 Treatment of Natives, Crown Mines, 1913–1914. Fifth Sitting, Third Witness, 26 June 1913.

the cage and kick us when we are going in, and we dare not do anything as we can't fight the white man.'<sup>39</sup>

It was after work at the hoist, the bottle-neck of the underground labour process, where whites and blacks waited for precious berths on the single lift that ferried three or four thousand men and thousands of tons broken rock more than a mile to the surface, that violence served to map racialised space. 'When we were up in a long line waiting for the cage', an Mfengu hammer driller explained, 'and a white man comes along and you happen to just touch him, he turns and hits the natives.'<sup>40</sup> The evidence of violence at the shaft stations was unmistakable. 'We get hammered at the cage by Machaisa (Noyce) the shift boss', Gqwela complained, 'The boys go into the cage as soon as they can; they know they are in for it, and it is just drive, drive, drive all the time with the sjambok.'<sup>41</sup>

For yet other workers, violence came to define their encounters with white workers in the narrow confines of the tunnels underground. 'If we are walking along a drive and meet a white man', a Tswana worker from 'Khama Country, Serowe' made a point of telling the commission, 'he simply lets rip at us and we meet another one and we get another belting.' These encounters underground resonated with the experiences that workers from the highveld had of whites on the farms. 'I know the white people very well', the same worker explained, 'I have grown up among them and I know my work .... They don't care a bit if the boys are hurt at all.'<sup>42</sup>

The evidence presented to the Crown Mines inquiry suggests that black workers understood the relationship between whites and blacks or, more appropriately perhaps, between *abelungu* and *abantu*, as an intrinsically violent one. But the testimony also suggests that it was not so much violence itself that the witnesses found objectionable, but a steady increase in simple racist assault. And they argued that matters were approaching a crisis at Crown Mines in the first half of 1913. As a metaphor for what he clearly saw as an outrageous departure from the norms of underground supervision, one of the workers related that he had been smoking his pipe waiting for the cage to arrive after shift when a white man took it out of his mouth and smashed it. He had worked on many mines on the East and Central Rand, and never seen one where workers were not assaulted, but this violence at Crown Mines was different. 'I have never seen a man assaulted for smoking down a mine', he explained, 'On other places I have been to there have been assaults, but in these cases the boys have done wrong. Here you get beaten without doing anything at all.'

Similarly, for some of the skilled workers it was not the application of violence underground that was intolerable, but that their seniority offered little or no protection against the racist caprice of the white workers. 'What worries me', one of the workers told the commission, 'is that I have been so long in this mine and now I am beaten. No boy down there has any value at all; they are simply licked by the Europeans.'<sup>43</sup>

While the testimony offered at the Crown Mines Inquiry certainly encouraged the state to investigate, and reform, the conditions of employment of African workers, underground violence in precisely these forms persisted for decades after the 1913 inquiry. Perhaps the best testimony to the mundane quality of violence was to be found in the reply that the Native Affairs Department received from the Crown Mines management two years after the inquiry. Company chairman Samuel Evans did not dispute that beatings were commonplace underground. On the contrary, he argued that 'the prevention of serious accidents is

39 *Ibid.*, Third Sitting, Twelfth Witness, 24 June 1913.

40 *Ibid.*, Fifteenth Witness, 24 June 1913.

41 *Ibid.*, Fourth Sitting, Second Witness, 25 June 1913.

42 *Ibid.*, Eighth Witness, 25 June 1913.

43 *Ibid.*, Third Sitting, First Witness, 25 June 1913.



dependent upon such discipline'.<sup>44</sup> In the course of the First World War the temporary rapprochement between the state and white workers, and the wider strategy of racial corporatism, discouraged close attention to the workings of violence underground. In the 1920s and again in the 1940s, management's interest in the character of violence underground was limited to statistical oversight and occasional attempts to ensure judicial equity. A thorough exploration of the meanings of violence underground during the period of this study requires us to examine the contemporary oral testimony of African migrant workers.

## Memories of the Boss Boys' Violence

The old migrants I interviewed for this study live within a triangle formed by the three Eastern Cape towns of Mount Ayliffe, Mount Frere and Tabankulu. They are from Mpondo, Xesibe and Bhaca ethnic communities. As such they fall into the category of isiXhosa-speakers who were seen by mine management, and other workers, as particularly belligerent in the inter-war years.<sup>45</sup> All of these men started work on the Witwatersrand mines between 1920 and 1939. Like the great mass of South African workers, many of them moved away from the mines soon after the Second World War. But a few chose to stay in the mines for their entire working lives.

One of these men was Qwebubuthu Danisa. He started work at New State Areas in 1939 and, after moving from one extinct shaft to the next, returned to Mount Frere in 1982. 'There at the State Mine', as he put it, 'compounds that died while I was there were three, that I parted with.'<sup>46</sup> Primarily because he spent so many continuous years on the mines, Danisa's kinsmen and neighbours regard him as *itshipa* – an absconder. His testimony describes the mines with a warmth and familiarity that is unusual amongst the senior men of the Tabankulu district. He is particularly enamoured of *umthetho* – the law – on the mines. But his account of his first days of underground work was preoccupied with violence, and presented in direct contrast to his labour on the white farms of East Griqualand.

It was difficult to such an extent that I regretted. I had stealthily left my white man I was working for, saying I am going home. Now I didn't have his address ... [I prayed] That God help me because I could see others taken back by their white men to the farms. I didn't have his address, that help me Lord I'm here. Come and fetch me because *emgodini* [underground] it's not like working on the farms.

The terrors of work underground – the physical effort of the work, the violence of supervisors and the heat of the mines – formed a large part of the folklore of migrant labour.

But I went there being told that 'Hey, there *emgodini* it's terrible, it's not right, you work, you drive'. The trouser, this, this, this coming from your place – *Umgodi* is hot – before you work.

Like many of the mineworkers recruited in the 1930s, his experience of mine work was associated with tramming. The particular dangers of pushing the ore-laden trucks along a rail-line used by many others were aggravated by the beatings administered by the 'Boss Boys'.

You work *ingolovane* you are beaten, *bhasboyi*. It does not matter even if you're thirty, even if you have much strength ... This thing called *ingolovane*, they say it's skotch-line, you are

44 *Ibid.*, Evans to Director of Native Labour, 25 April, 1915.

45 See Dunbar Moodie's study of faction fighting in *Going for Gold*, pp. 180–210.

46 Interview of Qwebubuthu Danisa by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 8 January 1992. All the subsequent quotes attributed to Danisa are from the same interview.

taught to drive. When you are driving you must not hold on. You must do this when you drive. They beat you for holding on, and even push you by the head. It was very terrible because it was difficult. It became nice when I was taken out because I was injured.

Violent supervision was not confined to the hustling of the trammers. Kathazo Sodlala started working at the same mine in 1934, and after working in a diamond mine, returned there in 1937. His memory of 'Stayiti Mine' was shaped by the beatings he received while loading the broken rock.

Wow, they really beat Beatings us. If you don't load, you're beaten. They said 'Come on, come on, come on'. It [the *sjambok*] would really get in. The *fiyas* would really get in ... It would land on your ribs and we'd load. It was hard.<sup>47</sup>

The prevalence of piece work encouraged beatings as the primary means of establishing work rhythms. 'If you don't take out the stuff in front of you, you get a beating', as Sodlala put it, 'the boss boy wants to push things.' 'For some there are reasons', another of my informants observed, he's asked to load and he, he's lazy and *isitofu* is still full here; Another cannot load, he's then beaten.'<sup>48</sup>

Mfeketho Sogoni worked at Brakpan Mines from 1930 to 1941. For many of those years he worked as a marshalling 'Boss Boy'. In his words, 'I guarded people then'. Sogoni understood his job as the protection of the workers from unknown dangers that might wait in the stopes and tunnels after blasting. He did not see it as a disciplinary activity. Nor did he deny that violence formed a part of his work. He simply suggested that these beatings were applied without venom. 'He didn't mind because you wouldn't injure him', he argued, 'you beat him like a child, maybe by a *klap*.' Seniority and skill were implicated and reproduced through the paternal violence of the 'Boss Boys'. This tended to restrict the experience of supervisory violence to new workers, or to the very young. 'When you're familiar', Sodlala observed, 'you just throw *mielies* in your mouth and sing.'<sup>49</sup> We can infer from this that senior or skilled workers tended to be free from the ubiquitous hustling associated with the training of new workers underground.

Nor was it simply the relationship between workers and overseers that was violent. The piecework system placed new workers, or those who sought to slow the pace of work, in direct opposition to their fellows. Lashing usually involved a chain of workers moving broken ore away from the rockface to the tunnels. And because all of their wages were determined by the number of trucks moved to the surface, lashers were acutely dependent on each other. 'You'll load it anyway, even if you're lazy, because I'll put stuff this big in front of you and find time to do nothing', Sodlala explained, 'The one that side wants the stuff to come to him, he depends on this one to be taken out to him.' This Fordist interdependence gave workers a financial interest in the harassment of slow or lazy lashers. Trammers – charged with the movement of the ore-trucks – faced these imperatives, and a few that were unique to their work. 'You are also beaten when working with *ingolovane*, but by others', Sodlala remembered, 'They don't really beat you they'd bump *ingolovane* on your ankles.' The relationship between violence and work underground was an intimate one, particularly in the early period of a migrant's time on the mines. Violence served to maintain the rhythm of work, and it served as the backbone of the underground work hierarchy.

47 Interview of Kathazo Sodlala by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.

48 Interview of Amos Bam by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.

49 Interview of Kathazo Sodlala by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.

## Memories of White Violence

The politics of assaults by white supervisors underground is intriguing. For some, they were an acceptable part of the social world underground. 'At first nobody minded', Mfeketho Sogoni, who was a senior worker and a boss boy for most of his time on the Reef, argued, 'there was nothing about it, it was allowed'. His younger brother, David, clearly did not agree. 'We were beaten, we were beaten', he remembered ruefully, 'a fist would go up here, the fist would go up here. We were beaten with a *klap*. We were beaten.'<sup>50</sup> These incessant supervisory beatings associated with underground work were objectionable but tolerable features of mine work; but they were associated with conspicuous acts of violence that ranged from racist caprice to an elaborate sadism.

Amos Bam started working at ERPM around 1935. In the years that followed he worked as a marshalling 'boss boy', and later as a machine driller, but he remembered his first shift underground very clearly.

*Umlungu* used to do like this – Can I stand up and imitate him? – he'd put a plank in water and tell me to stand on one leg. He'd beat me till he stops when he feels like it and I wouldn't beat him back but then when I work and get used to the place, he asks me to put some planks in water so as to beat others – but when I arrived I was beaten as well.

These beatings were clearly intended to establish the sanctity of the racial hierarchy at the very onset of a worker's time on the mines. The casual viciousness of the violent initiation into underground work was tremendously exacerbated by the new worker's inexperience in the terrain of the tunnels.

Others are new, they just get in no matter how a place looks like – they haven't been taught. I then saw that there's danger here *emgodini*. I noticed that it's important for a person to be told when he arrives *emgodini* – that 'This is where you must go and you mustn't go to such and such a place'. And when *umlungu* arrives he beats people and another would run and fall off where they tip stones.

The combination of the unrestrained violence of white overseers, and the unseen perils of the mine, represented an acute threat to the safety of new workers underground.

Amos Bam was deeply aware of the racist subordination demanded by white workers underground. 'It started when I had to say "*baas*" as old as I am, if I see you', he explained, 'No matter what the "*baas*" says I must do, or where he says I must go, I obey, even if it's wrong.' Nor should we forget that Bam, like the elder Sogoni, was a 'Boss Boy', responsible for the maintenance of discipline and safety underground. The exhibitionist violence of white supervisors was one of the most powerful threats to the safety of the workers under his charge.

But he also suggested that black workers were in part responsible for the reproduction of the violence.

The greatest reason was that people were respectful, they didn't answer back even if *ibhasboyi* said this is not okay. If *umlungu* says to me – as big as I am – I must stop so that he can beat me, I stop and he beats me. I could beat him, but we were respectful [*sahlonipha*].<sup>51</sup>

There is something ambiguous about this account of black workers' attitudes to white violence. Bam suggested that it was, in part, their failure to react that encouraged white men to beat black workers; but he also implied that their restraint was virtuous.

The term that the migrants used to describe their refusal to respond to white violence in kind was *ukuhlonipha*. It is one of a number of related words that can be used to convey

50 Interview of David Sogoni by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 3 February 1992.

51 Interview of Amos Bam by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.

respect or deference, but it has very specific associations. The abstract noun *hlonipha* is used in everyday speech to describe the proper relationship between a wife and her husband. In this instance, it is particularly associated with the avoidance of things and places male.<sup>52</sup> But the idea of *ubuhlonipha* is central to the relationship between generations of men. For very old male informants, to show respect in this way is a very powerfully valorised expectation of their sons. The use of the term *hlonipha* to describe restraint in the face of violence (where the word for fear – *ukwesaba* – might seem more appropriate) suggests that it was seen as a sign of moral and physical strength.

But if there was any virtue to restraint, it existed in a state of sustained contradiction. On the one hand, white violence was infuriatingly unjust, as Bam related, 'If they find me here they'd just come in and *klap* me if they don't like me'. While on the other, the letter and the spirit of the law appeared to protect the white workers in their confrontations with black men underground. 'We were not scared of him but we didn't beat him back', Bam explained, 'otherwise we could be jailed.' The racial allegiances that shaped the practice of justice were not confined to the courts or commissions on the surface; they saturated the work hierarchy and were evident on a daily basis. As Bam explained, when workers followed orders that they knew to be dangerous, they bore the public anger of senior officials, while the whites would discuss things out of earshot.

When the big one comes he asks, 'Why did you do this? Didn't I tell you not to do such a thing because you'll get injured?' I say, '*Umlungu* said so'. He then *klaps* me. [ ... ] I'm beaten. He doesn't speak harshly to him. He doesn't ask him 'Why did you tell him to do this?' Even if he speaks to him it will be on that other side. It was common for a [black] person to be beaten.<sup>53</sup>

In this light the consequences of challenging white violence seemed all too obvious. The solidarity of white workers and the powers of the work hierarchy, meant that the migrants faced almost certain retribution if they dared to bring evidence against white workers. Bam was insistent: 'They were not taken to jail – Even when someone died, you would not testify that he died from *umlungu's* beatings'.

All underground workers were subject to the physical authority of a small elite of senior underground officials. 'The Shift-bosses don't play with you', Sodlala explained, 'they beat.' Where the 'Boss Boys' maintained the routine of work through violence over gangs of unskilled lashers and trammers, more senior workers faced these dangers from the roaming white supervisors. As part of his duties as a 'Boss Boy', Mfeketho Sogoni accompanied the Mine Captain on his daily tours of the underground workings. These tours were filled with peril for workers cut off from the hustling of the gangers and 'Boss Boys'. '*Umgodi* makes you drowsy', he explained, 'If you keep quiet for a little while you get drowsy.' Away from the frantic hustle of the trammers and lashers, the intoxicating, silent, darkness in the tunnels was fraught with danger. 'If he finds you there in that mistake of finding you relaxed', David Sogoni, who worked as a winch operator, remembered ruefully, 'You are not only going to be beaten, you'll not forget.'<sup>54</sup>

## Shift Bosses and Mine Captains

White officials were conspicuously skilled at beatings, and there is good reason to believe that shift bosses and mine captains were selected in large part for their physical abilities to

52 Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest; Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (London, Oxford University Press for the IAI, 1961), pp. 36–40.

53 Interview of Amos Bam by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.

54 Interview of David Sogoni by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 3 February 1992.

monopolise violence underground. In a similar way, these officials tended to select powerfully built African assistants to serve as their 'Picannins'.<sup>55</sup> The strength of these men was of immense importance during accidents underground, but they also dramatically increased the physical presence of white officials. There was a powerful causal relationship between the dangerous presence of white officials and the respect that African workers afforded them.

For many mines, rugby provided one mechanism for selecting the right kind of men. Piet Lombard, another ex-Shift Boss, currently runs the training centre, and a fledgling museum, at the now very old and marginal ERPM in Boksburg. His amusing description of a job interview on the mine in the late 1960s, reflects the enthusiasm with which white miners approached the sport:

Even when I came to ERPM the first thing the manager, Mr Poonsmuller, asked me, 'Are you playing rugby?' and I said, 'YES!' Ha ha ha. He said 'Give him a job'.<sup>56</sup>

The amusement this story provoked suggests that white officials understood that it was not possible to base hiring and promotions on sport alone. Rugby seems, rather, to have functioned as the ideal of masculinity, even where it ran counter to production imperatives. Cornelius Oosthuisen, who moved quickly from miner to Shift-Boss (and ultimately to the top underground job of Mine Captain), attributed his rapid success to managerial interest in Rugby.

And they pushed me in as shift-baas on the job right away, but, but now they thought they were doing me a favour. I was playing rugby for ERPM in '42, and I played for Transvaal and they thought they were doing me now a favour to make me shift-baas. I was getting half of the money that I was earning at New Modder.

The history of the white South African infatuation with rugby has been understudied, but two points seem indisputable here. Mine management sought to incorporate men who performed well in the provincial or club sides by offering them what Oosthuisen called the 'many privileges' of senior officials – even where this might have meant a decline in wages. Their reasons for rewarding rugby players were many. A mine like ERPM employed in excess of 1,000 white men, and to some degree a significant amount of the company morale was attached to the strength of the local rugby team. But there is little doubt that rugby players were also absorbed into the mine hierarchy because they were physically dominant underground. In Cornelius Oosthuisen's case, his size is unmistakable, and if his prowess at rugby was not sufficient as a marker of his strength, he was also a boxer. 'I made friends from boxing and, ahh, you know if they see you can use yourself they, they soon make friends with you.'<sup>57</sup>

Shift bosses and mine captains were often physically large men, who knew how to 'use themselves', but their power underground was premised upon a tight bond between them and their personal 'Boss-boys'. Unlike most other African workers, these senior workers were on the mines for very long periods of time, and their relationships with their white bosses were enduring. 'Well, to tell you all the years that I've been working', Oosthuisen remarked, 'I only had three personal boss boys'. Looking back over a career on the mines that began sixty years ago, Oosthuisen couldn't recall the surnames of the men he had worked with. 'Albert ...', he said slowly, using Afrikaans pronunciation and struggling unsuccessfully for a surname, 'Albert, Flip, Paul'.

<sup>55</sup> The term 'piccanin' was used to describe the informal African assistants that most senior white workers allotted themselves. The position was not formally part of the company hierarchy, nor was it a position like 'Boss Boy' that drew better pay or formal authority.

<sup>56</sup> Interview of Piet Lombard by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Cornelius Oosthuisen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

On the face of it, then, Oosthuisen's relationship with his 'personal boss-boys' appears not to have been very close. Like so many other South African relationships across the colour-bar, the association between shift bosses and their assistants did not require the white partner to know his African assistant's real name. But long-term work relationships on the mines were complex and interesting. 'Now look, in the hostels they don't go by their name only', Oosthuisen remembered, as if to mitigate his inability to recover a surname, 'They've adopted my name. It's Albert Oosthuisen.'<sup>58</sup> His friend, Mathuysen, was amused by the sensation of the words rolling around in his mouth:

Flip Oosteesh! [chuckle] They called him Fleep Oosteesh. That was now his nickname, Oosteesh! Oosthuisen!<sup>59</sup>

Notwithstanding their mutual dependence, and even fondness, the emotional distance between black and white men on the mines was like a tangible boundary that is well captured in the gruff, menacing speech that white workers used to converse with their black subordinates. Yet it is difficult to imagine a more explicit sign of mutual identity than the fact that the senior 'boss-boys' adopted their bosses' surnames. This tight association between the most senior African and the most senior white workers underground did much to bolster the simple physical authority of the shift bosses. Shift bosses 'appeared unbeatable' because their own physical strength was directly complemented by their personal 'Boss-boys'.

At the heart of this was the mutual recognition of what it meant to be a man. Joe Mathuysen was describing what he perceived as the different ethnic strengths of black mineworkers when he recalled his long-serving personal 'boss-boy' as section shift boss at ERPM. The man, recalled only as Simon, was Bhaca and the bearer of the demeaning ethnic stereotype universally applied to the amaBhaca in South Africa as latrine bucket carriers. 'You ask Mr Oosthuisen here, my section boss-boy shift boss was a mabhaca, the bucket blokes', he exclaimed, 'well I don't think I've ever seen a man more man than this bloke .... Hêre [God], what a man, man!'<sup>60</sup>

This idea of 'a man more man' revolved around physical strength and courage underground. In order to illustrate the tight dependence between shift bosses and their assistants, Mathuysen told a well rehearsed story of being rescued from certain death. His life, in this instance, was preserved by the sheer physical strength of the man he called his 'piccanin'. 'Once on southwest where Mr Oosthuisen and myself were working,' he explained, 'people were trapped and they had all the shift bosses from central out that night on southwest.' Mathuysen was called from his own station on the Hercules shaft, to go underground with just one other Shift-Boss on the depleted central shaft. Moving rapidly from one working place to another in order to meet the minimum requirements of the Mines and Works Act, he was caught in a massive rock movement.

So I came out of one stope into another one, Hêre, and then it went. [Bangs hand on the table] A rockburst. Both these stopes. The one that I just came out closed up and the one that I was in closed up. And I was caught up till there [indicates chest] and I lost my hat and I lost my lamp and I had a Malawi piccanin at this time, and I could see this bloke.

The sheer physical danger of being trapped underground in a rock burst is difficult to imagine. It is certainly impossible to describe and Mathuysen was struggling to relate the combined effects of murderous rock movements, darkness, helplessness, and the speed of the disintegrating hanging wall.

58 Interview with Cornelius Oosthuisen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

59 Interview with Joe Mathuysen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

60 Interview with Joe Mathuysen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

The arm was sitting like this, no hat, no nothing. Trying to get out. And I said to him, 'Yena lo fika lapha [This one! Come here!] you bloody bastard give me [Loudly in the characteristic gruff voice used by white men with black subordinates]'. So eventually he turned around and he saw me, and he just pulled me out, he just *pulled* me out. He was a big bloke. He pulled me clear out of this rock . . . He pulled me, otherwise, I don't know, I don't know because everything at that moment was coming in. It was just caving in.<sup>61</sup>

The astonishment and gratitude at the sheer physical strength, and the courage, of this 'piccanin' who was 'man more man' rings through the repeated phrases 'he just pulled me out' and 'I don't know'. Mathuysen knew all too well that without his assistant he would have died.

White and black men on the mines were separated by a rich array of cultural, political and economic forces that worked to denigrate the masculinity of African males. (The word 'piccanin' is only the most extreme example of the many terms used to debase and emasculate African men). And yet a commonly held notion of masculinity was fostered by the material extremity of work underground: central to this ideal was physical strength and courage.

## Fighting Back

Mine captains and shift bosses were literally, as well as figuratively, unbeatable. But the attitude of respect adopted by black workers in their encounters with white workers was not simply a response to their tactical calculations underground. It was nurtured and reproduced by cycles of violence that were transmitted in sometimes uneven, but nonetheless powerful, ways from the strength of the Mine Captain's 'Picannin', through the mundane violence of the police and the prisons, to the symbolic thrashings handed out by the troops during the 1920 and 1946 strikes. It is hardly surprising that some black workers abstained from responding to white violence in kind; but it is significant, as we will see below, that some did not feel any such compunction.

In one important respect Fanon's theory of colonial violence warrants substantial correction. 'The native, bent double, more dead than alive', he argues, 'exists interminably in an unchanging dream.'<sup>62</sup> This account of the self-consciousness, and ideological resources, that natives brought to their encounter with the settler, albeit hyperbole, is wholly incorrect. While both the archival and oral evidence suggest that migrant workers might have had good reason to live in what Sartre coined the 'nervous condition'<sup>63</sup> of the native, the very existence of this evidence is proof enough that they did not. As I have argued elsewhere, migrant workers brought with them to the mines fully developed ideas of justice, and strategies for achieving it.<sup>64</sup> Their awareness and complaints of the outrageous treatment handed out to them underground was one important part of that understanding. In a similar way, but with very different results, they brought with them powerful ideas about violence.

The migrants who worked on the mines in the thirties and forties, were not the first workers to travel to the Witwatersrand. Most of the men I interviewed in the Mzimvubu valley formed part of the second generation to make that journey. But the memory of a martial past remains very strong amongst these men. The challenge of violence underground fitted neatly into their understandings of the appropriate capacities of manhood.

61 Interview with Joe Mathuysen by Keith Breckenridge, ERPM Training Centre, 22 December 1992.

62 Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 41.

63 Sartre, 'Preface', in *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 17.

64 Keith Breckenridge, 'We Must Speak for Ourselves: the Rise and Fall of a Public Sphere on the South African Gold Mines, 1920–1931', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40, 1 (1998), pp. 71–108.

Johannes Mdlamza, one of the oldest informants, took his first contract to the Hercules Compound at ERPM sometime in the course of the 1920s. He was then, and remains, an ardent member of the *amaQaba*.<sup>65</sup> 'I won't understand anything relating to tickets', as he put it, 'because we were people who didn't take much notice of how many tickets we worked.' Notwithstanding his distaste for schooling, Mdlamza very soon became a drill-operator, a job that carried better pay and a measure of independence. 'I liked it because nobody managed me there', he observed, 'I managed myself.'<sup>66</sup>

These characteristics – his traditionalism and his experience as a driller – may separate Mdlamza from his compatriots. His understanding of the meaning of violence underground was certainly distinct. 'We were beaten *emgodini* and we fought back', he insisted, 'We were beaten by *ibhasboyi*, beaten by *abelungu*. We fought with *abelungu*. I used to fight a lot'. Of course, the imperatives of the intervening past weigh on all these accounts, and it would be foolish to ignore Mdlamza's contemporary position as the oldest man in his extended family, and the senior patriarch of his village. Representations of himself as the victim of white workers' violence would contradict both his self-image and his reputation. But there is an immediacy and verisimilitude to his account that implied personal experience.

I used to fight a lot – fighting with *abelungu* – fighting with *ibhasboyi*. If I had fought here I'd sometimes go up a tunnel and emerge in another *umgodi* that side. I'd arrive in the tunnels and climb on sites and go up through them – through the old sites this big – I want to go to a station where there are people where I'd get into a cage to the compound – or to a closed mine sometimes.<sup>67</sup>

Aside from these graphic accounts of his escape through the old tunnels and collapsed stopes of the mine, Mdlamza's testimony reveals a great deal about masculinity and violence underground. 'We fight and I beat him if I beat him', he explained, 'He beats me if he beats me and I run to *emgodini*.' Unlike the confrontations described by other informants, violence in Mdlamza's testimony involved both sides in a contest with established rules and consequences. In both of these descriptions the unknown, unregulated space of the mine served as neutral terrain to which the workers could retreat to resolve tensions produced by the violence. But Mdlamza's testimony also suggests that ideologies of masculinity placed some constraints on the racial asymmetries of the work hierarchy, and it certainly indicates that not all workers perceived the whites as unbeatable.

Even Amos Bam, who was acutely aware of the capriciousness of white violence, acknowledged that arbitrary beatings were disrupted by black workers prepared to fight back. 'There were those who fought back', he agreed, 'There were those I also fought with, and some would not take the matter further.'<sup>68</sup> Like the 'hardmen' who dominated violence in Belfast before the paramilitaries, the migrants who retaliated to white violence in kind sometimes managed to substitute dyadic confrontations for the anonymous racial violence characteristic of the beatings underground.

While it was not unknown for those who worked in the teams of lashers or trammers to fight back, retaliation was far more likely amongst the better paid and older workers who tended to take on machine drilling. This change, from the collective subordination of the gangs of lashers and trammers to the solitary factiousness of the drillers, can be traced in one informant's testimony.

65 This word is usually translated as 'the Reds', but it is best understood, in Mdlamza's case, as a rejection of the 'comforts' of modernity. See O'Connell, 'Reds, Rascals and Gentlemen', pp. 255–304.

66 Interview of Johannes Mdlamza by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 17 October 1992.

67 Interview of Johannes Mdlamza by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 17 October 1992.

68 Interview of Amos Bam by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.



Kathazo Sodlala, you will remember, stressed the brutal and humiliating treatment of trammers at State Mines in Brakpan. Early in the 1940s, he moved to Crown Mines and took on the work of a 'Spanner-boy'. His new job and experience gave him more confidence in the world underground, but he had not forgotten the dangers of working the ore-trucks. Here is his account:

You see to tell the truth, *tatomncinci* [uncle] took me out of [underground work] after I beat *ibhasboyi*. I beat him. People slept on the track – On *makalanyana*'s track and I came and sat here. At that time *emgodini* I worked as a spanner of the machine. People coming with *makalanyana* came with it and I said, 'Wait, you can't come with *makalanyana* here. There are people who are sleeping here. You'll break their legs.' The Shangane and amaTshopi went back with *umakalanyana*. We sat in the station. You see there are corners in the station and we sat here. They turned and went down to the station. They came back after they had broken *umakalanyana*. They came back with *ingolovane* that's used for *umakalanyana*. It came and stood like this. *Umlungu* came and said 'Which one beat you?' They said I had beaten them. A Shangane speaker pointed at me. One Mpondo man from Tabankulu said 'Stand up, he's going to kick you in the mouth'. I stood up, sprang up to him and beat him. I held him here, turned his head about and broke it. It was then. He came to fight back and I boxed and kicked him. When the whites came, some from the Red Cross, I already had *ijombolo* this short. I was working on him with it.<sup>69</sup>

It matters very little whether this event took the precise form that Sodlala indicates; it is significant that his assailant changes from being a 'boss boy' to 'umlungu', but that does not invalidate the other elements of the story (the archival record is replete with similar evidence). Moreover, whatever its empirical content, this account reveals several important features of violence underground.

The most obvious is that migrants, far from perceiving themselves as the helpless victims of white violence, relished the capacity for exuberant retaliation. Sodlala makes the unmistakable point that the meaning of graphic violence was not restricted to the racist battery of the white workers. Nor was it confined to the hierarchies of the labour process. Indeed, this account suggests that his white assailant was acting to revenge the beating his workers had received earlier. And the individual isolation, so often characteristic of the testimony of violence, was disrupted by the perennial solidarity of home friends. It is, however, significant that the assailant in this case was transgressing into another working area, and more importantly, moving into an unknown matrix of work relations. Neither Sodlala nor his fellow workers owed any allegiance to the ganger or 'boss boy' who was threatening him. The power of ethnic associations on the surface has long been recognised, but Sodlala's account suggests that under specific conditions workers could rely on these networks to strengthen their response to violence underground. Finally, we see in this account the symbolic and performative interpenetration of violence and work that was characteristic of the social world underground. It was no accident that Sodlala chose to use *ijombolo* – the drill stick – to *work* on his adversary.

## Conclusion

Interpersonal violence was a ubiquitous and continuous feature of the mining industry for at least the first half of this century. Organised and constrained violence was one defining feature of young black men's adolescent lives in the countryside. For many young white men, sport – especially rugby – took the place of organised stick fighting as the arena for the learning of the arts of violence, strength and physical courage. Given this background, it is not particularly surprising that violence gave formal expression to the work hierarchy

69 Interview of Kathazo Sodlala by Jones Mzayifani and Keith Breckenridge, Siyaya, 16 October 1992.

underground. But the ubiquity of violence underground obscures the ways in which seniority, space, and particular jobs structured conflict. Nor is it impossible to avoid the conclusion that systematic violence – whether applied by an over-enthusiastic black supervisor or a paternalistic white boss – gave a tangible meaning to race on the mines, and perhaps in the wider society. On the other side of this grim coin, the prevalence of violence encouraged a strange form of mutual recognition between white and black workers. The banality of violence in the daily operations of mining, and the simple, terrifying, dangers of the mine itself placed a premium on individual personal strength for all workers, but particularly for senior workers who spent decades underground and often in the most hazardous conditions. The physical interdependence between the most senior workers and their African assistants encouraged a close masculine bond. In these relationships white workers celebrated African masculinity as physical strength and courage. These are the same qualities that black workers celebrated in their own accounts of retaliation. The point here is that racist violence formed a piece of a larger masculine ethic that valorised interpersonal violence underground. While this shared idea of manliness prompted some white and black workers to recognise each other as men, it also served to reproduce the endless violence of mine work.

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